



Luke Howard presents basis of modern classification & nomenclature of clouds – December, 1802

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General Note



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Luke Howard "The Godfather of Clouds" was born in London on 28 November 1772. He was never a trained meteorologist or scientist, but he was a real weather enthusiast with a lifelong interest in meteorology. He was an amateur meteorologist and the man whom we must credit with nothing less than being the father of our modern cloud classification system. Clouds were simply described by their color or form, often as the farmers or sailors saw them, such as dark, white, woolly, buttermilk or mackerel skies. They were believed to be too changeable and short-lived to be classified. In December 1802, Luke Howard delivered a lecture that was to be a defining point in natural history and meteorology. He named the clouds, classifying them in terms that remain familiar to this day: cirrus, stratus, cumulus, and nimbus. This new and precise nomenclature sparked worldwide interest and captured the imaginations of some of the century's greatest figures in the fields of art, literature, and science. Goethe, Constable, and Coleridge were among those who came to revere Howard's vision of an aerial landscape. Legitimized by the elevation of this new classification and nomenclature, meteorology fast became a respectable science. *The Invention of Clouds* is a detailed and informative examination of Howard's life and achievements and introduces a new audience to the language of the skies. Howards cloud classification system quickly gained wide acceptance among European scientists and influenced many painters, poets and philosophers of the Romantic Era, notably Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Joseph M. W. Turner and Caspar David Friedrich. In fact, Howard sketched many cloud forms in water colors himself. Because of his many contributions to the emerging science of meteorology, in 1821 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society, the highest honor his peers could confer. He was a lifelong member of the Society of Friends (the Quakers) and devoted much energy and time to the good works of this denomination. He was a devoted family man. He was a prolific writer and editor. His Seven lectures in Meteorology comprised the first textbook in weather. His *Climate of London* was the first book in urban climatology. He died on March 21, 1864 in London.